What the New Testament Says about the Jew

By Pastor David F. Reagan

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INTRODUCTION

What does the New Testament say about the Jew? Does the New Testament forever condemn the Jewish people as Christ-killers who eternally have the blood of Christ on their hands? Or is this teaching simply the pitiful excuse of hatemongers looking to justify their pernicious wickedness? What does the New Testament really say about the Jew? That is the purpose of this brief treatise. If you are a Jew, these words are for you.

The Jewish people understand that when two Jews are discussing a subject they are likely to have three opinions. However, they sometimes do not understand the differences between those who claim to follow Christ. Many know that Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant reformation, encouraged the persecution of the Jews. However, few know that he also wrote a paper encouraging the persecution of the group known as the Anabaptists–the forerunners of the present day Baptists. Today, the Jews of Russia know that the Russian Baptists suffered alongside of them in that land. Please do not think of all Christians as historically hating the people of Israel. Even today, Baptist believers form one of the strongest blocks of supporters for the nation of Israel. Our love is very real and is an integral part of our faith. Let me explain.

If there is one belief that is central to the Baptist faith, it would be the belief that the Bible is the absolute authority for all truth. We believe that anything left to human reasoning, philosophy or tradition has a faulty foundation. All truth must either proceed from or be tested by the Word of God.

Our Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments bound together as one book. Our Old Testament is the same as the Jewish Tenach. Since the Old Testament is three times as long as the New Testament, 75% of our Bible is the same as yours. That is a lot of common heritage.

We know that no one can support anti-Semitism from the Tenach. So, does the New Testament teach a hatred of the Jewish people? The answer is a resounding "NO"! In fact, though the New Testament is very honest in discussing the differences between the Jews and the true Christians, most of what is taught about the Jew is absolutely positive. My belief in the authority of the New Testament is the reason for my strong love for the Jewish people. So please read on and find out what the New Testament really says about the Jew.

1. Salvation is of the Jews

Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman in Sychar about eternal life. She wanted to talk about the correct place to worship God. Was it on Mount Gerezim as the Samaritans believe or in Jerusalem as believed by the Jews. Jesus answered her plainly, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

So, there it is plain and simple. God's way of salvation came to man through the Jews. Jesus came to fulfill the law and not to destroy it (Matt.5:17). Despite what some have taught, Jesus did not oppose the teaching of the Tenach. He fulfilled it! God sent salvation to man through the Jewish people.

2. God's Word Came Through the Jews

When some early Christians claimed that the Jews had no advantage, the apostle Paul disagreed with them. "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom.3:1-2). The oracles of God were His spoken and written words. In other words, God's word has come to man through the Jews. Even the New Testament was written by Jews. Without the Jew, I would not have my Bible. I am very thankful for this great gift!

3. God's Gifts to Man Came Through the Jews

Beyond the gifts of salvation and God's word, there are other gifts that God has given to man and these also came through the Jews. Paul, in another place, speaks of the "Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom.9:4-5). To Israel was given the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law, the service of God, the promises and the fathers. Although these gifts were properly to Israel, all mankind has benefitted from them. Take, for instance, the giving of the law. The law was for Israel. Yet, today, all good government is in some way based on the ten commandments. God has given to man many gifts through the Jewish people.

The last gift mentioned is very special. It is the gift of my Savour Jesus Christ. I know that you may not believe in Jesus. However, I still thank you for the gift of my precious Savour! Paul, in reference to Jesus, said, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor.9:15). I must say the same. When Jesus came to this earth, "he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). He came to this earth as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

I realize that the concept of one who is both completely God and completely man may seem strange to you, but the concept originally comes, not from the New Testament, but from the Jewish Tenach. Think about these words taken from the prophecy of Isaiah (9:6): "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." How could these divine titles be given to one who was no more than a man? Yet, I must go on.

4. The Jews Rejected Jesus as Their Messiah

The apostle John said of Jesus, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The phrase, "his own", refers to the Jewish people. This is not a statement of hatred but of simple fact. The Jews, as a whole, still reject Jesus as their Messiah. Of course, there are some other passages which are used as a basis for hatred but those who use them for hatred are misusing them. Consider the following.

The apostle Peter preached, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; [h]im, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:22-23). So, there you have it. Peter said to the men of Israel that they by wicked hands took and crucified Jesus. And throughout the ages,

wicked men calling themselves Christian have used this passage and a couple of others to call Jews Christ-killers and to persecute the Jewish people.

But is this the true teaching of the New Testament? No. While it is true that the apostles held the Jews responsible for their part in the crucifiction of Jesus, they also recognized the responsibility of others. According to the law of the Romans, the Jews could not have crucified Jesus themselves. But this is not all. Listen to the prayer of Peter and the other apostles made shortly after the statement made in the above paragraph.

"Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:24-28).

Did you read that? Yes, the people of Israel were guilty. But so were the Gentiles and Herod and Pilate. You see, the whole world is guilty for the rejection of Jesus. We had him here offered to us and we all rejected him! Right before the verse that says his own received him not (John 1:11), we read, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (John 1:10). His own received him not; the world knew him not. We all rejected him and we all are guilty of his blood by our membership in the race of man! There is no New Testament justification for any sort of mistreatment of the Jews. Anyone who teaches this has rejected the New Testament!

5. The Jews Attempt to Establish Their Own Righteousness

Another New Testament teaching concerning the Jews regards the way in which they seek to know God and obtain salvation. You must be the judge as to whether this is true or not. Speaking of the Jewish people, Paul states, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:2-3).

I realize that this statement may seem offensive. I ask that you withhold your anger and think about what Paul is saying. He credits the Jew for having a great zeal of God and for working hard to establish their own righteousness. Is this not true of the faithful Jew? He works very hard to live righteously. His zeal is seen in the care with which he obeys the traditions of the fathers.

So, of what does Paul say the Jew is ignorant? He is ignorant of God’s righteousness. How can that be? A Jew certainly understands the greatness of God’s righteousness. His ignorance must be of something about God’s righteousness. But what? The answer is found in the testimony of the apostle Paul.

In the book of Philippians, Paul tells of the things of which he could boast; "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:5-6). Yet Paul did not trust in his own righteousness. In fact, he said that, "what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Philippians 3:7). He counted all things but loss that he might win Christ and "be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

Every religion in the world including Judiasm and most who claim to be Christians have devised some plan by which they can use their own efforts to become righteousness. The Bible teaches that a man cannot earn his own salvation–and not just in the New Testament. Ecclesiastes 7:20 teaches: "For

there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Solomon said, "for there is no man that sinneth not" (I Kings 8:46).

Therefore, no man can achieve perfect righteousness. As a result, all men including Jews are under a curse. Deuteronomy 27:26, after the giving of the law, states, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen." Notice, the man who does not do all the words of this law is said to be cursed. Yet, all men fail in the law at some point. David said of mankind, "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:3).

The problem of the Jew is that even though a perfectly righteous life is what God requires, he cannot live it. Yet, he continues to try to earn his righteousness by his own efforts. As a result, some Jews are caught up in seeking and declaring ever new rules and regulations for the achieving of righteousness while most Jews have given up and observe only the most outward and traditional signs of their Jewishness. Is it not strange that so many Jews are practicing atheists? Their religion has not given them peace.

God's way is found in imputed rigtheousness. Again, the original teaching of this doctrine comes from the Tanach. Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). That is imputed righteousness. Man believes and God imputes righteousness on him. But whose righteousness is placed on us. Paul trusted in the imputed righteousness of Jesus. Our sin is placed on Jesus while the righteousness of Jesus is placed on us. God "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

This is the essence of true Christianity. Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins. I believe in him as my Lord and Savour. In the power of his resurrection I live and have eternal life. His righteousness in first imputed to me and by his strength in me I daily grow closer in living in that righteousness. Paul taught of salvation, "That if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thime heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation...For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:9-10,13).

6. The Jews Will Yet Receive Their Kingdom

One reason that true Christians are so supportive of the nation of Israel and Jews in general is that we believe what God told Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Genesis 12:3). Another reason is the knowledge that the Jews will yet have their kingdom. Yes–this too is taught in the New Testament.

Right before Jesus ascended up into heaven after his resurrection, his disciples asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus did not tell them they were mistaken about the restoration but rather answered, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). The restoration would come but the time was not to be revealed.

Paul taught that, "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25). In other words, the times of Gentile domination will one day come to an end. "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11:26-27). Other passages in the New Testament also confirm this truth that Israel will again be the center of God's kingdom on earth some day in the future. Oh, what a glorious day that will be!

7. Even Now Some Jews Will Come to Jesus as their Messiah

Paul asks, "Hath God cast away his people?" (Romans 11:1). He answers, "God forbid...God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2). He goes on to tell how that Elijah thought that he was the only one who had remained faithful to God. Yet God reminded him that there were still seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Paul then concludes, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5). There always have been and always will be Jews who recognize Jesus as their true Messiah. Perhaps the Lord is speaking to you right now.

CONCLUSION

Paul declared, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1). He further testified, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:2-3). Paul knew that each individual must accept or reject Jesus Christ on their own. However, he loved his people so much that he would have been willing to give up his place in heaven if it would have meant their salvation. What an expression of love!

Yet, a greater love than this was described by the prophet Isaiah. He spoke of a man who was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3).

But this man did not suffer for his own sins but for our sins. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all: (Isaiah 53:4-6).

The prophecy of this chapter does not fit Isaiah nor anyone else in the history of the world except Jesus Christ. Jesus is truly the anointed one; the Messiah of Israel. Whether you receive him or not, I will still love you. My love is not based on you having my faith. But, oh, how I wish you could know the peace that comes by believing in Jesus! Will you at least consider him?

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